***To his Coy Mistress***

by Andrew Marvell

Had we but world enough, and time,  
This coyness, lady, were no crime.  
We would sit down and think which way  
To walk, and pass our long love's day;  
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side  
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide  
Of Humber would complain. I would  
Love you ten years before the Flood;  
And you should, if you please, refuse  
Till the conversion of the Jews.  
My vegetable love should grow  
Vaster than empires, and more slow.  
An hundred years should go to praise  
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;  
Two hundred to adore each breast,  
But thirty thousand to the rest;  
An age at least to every part,  
And the last age should show your heart.  
For, lady, you deserve this state,  
Nor would I love at lower rate.  
  
        But at my back I always hear  
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;  
And yonder all before us lie  
Deserts of vast eternity.  
Thy beauty shall no more be found,  
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound  
My echoing song; then worms shall try  
That long preserv'd virginity,  
And your quaint honour turn to dust,  
And into ashes all my lust.  
The grave's a fine and private place,  
But none I think do there embrace.  
  
        Now therefore, while the youthful hue  
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,  
And while thy willing soul transpires  
At every pore with instant fires,  
Now let us sport us while we may;  
And now, like am'rous birds of prey,  
Rather at once our time devour,  
Than languish in his slow-chapp'd power.  
Let us roll all our strength, and all  
Our sweetness, up into one ball;  
And tear our pleasures with rough strife  
Thorough the iron gates of life.  
Thus, though we cannot make our sun  
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

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AP English Literature & Composition

Mr. Lane – Period 4

December 9, 2009

Poetry Explication

Literary devices greatly enhance the way in which a poem is read and perceived. With the knowledge of various literary devices, the task of decoding the true meaning of the poem becomes much easier to comprehend. What makes poetry such a dynamic and fascinating style of writing? Is it perhaps its ability to mystify the reader by offering such extensive metaphors and allusions, or maybe the way in which a simple phrase or stanza can have so much meaning? “To his Coy Mistress,” by Andrew Marvell, utilizes literary devices to clearly exemplify what the poem is really saying. The use of rhyme, simile, and imagery assist in recognizing the theme of the poem: Live your life while you are young and experience things you haven’t experienced while youthful.

Throughout “To his Coy Mistress” rhymes and rhythm accompany one another allowing the poem to flow smoothly and efficiently while also clarifying what the poem is saying. “Thou by the Indian Ganges’ side/Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide” (5-6) is an example of perfect rhyme and approximate rhyme. “Side” and “find” sound similar and introduce the element of consonance The “da” sound at the end of both words identifies the pair has having consonance, or the repetition of final consonant sounds; Whereas “side” and “tide” is an example of perfect rhyme in that the consonant and vowel sounds both sound the same. The two lines are significant in that the man in the story wants his sweetheart to realize that water is never stationary, and neither should be their relationship. He wants to move quickly through their relationship and essentially wants to have sex with her as soon as possible. The rhymes really give these two lines added significance and allow for the poem to continue smoothly and surely. Another rhyme occurs later on in the poem, “Deserts of vast eternity / That long-preserved virginity” (24). The words don’t completely sound equivalent to one another however the final consonant sounds have similar sounds, thus consonance comes into play again.. The two lines in the second stanza allude to the fact that the man in the poem doesn’t want to wait for what seems like eternity to take his sweetheart’s virginity from her. His claim is that “we should do it now while we are young” and the rhyme helps to clarify what he is trying to say. The rhyme makes the poem much more interesting and allows the poem to gain an added sense of depth and importance.

Rhyme can only clarify so much as to what the poem is really trying to say, thus other literary devices are used to understand a poem’s meaning. Similes and metaphors, for example, compare things unlike one another.. “My vegetable love should grow” and “And now, like amorous birds of prey” (11, 38) contrast each other in the poem. Essentially, the main character has a strong love for his girl and realizes that over a period of time, his “vegetable love” will continue to mature; meaning his simple love for her will gradually turn into sexual love. The simile contrasts with his “vegetable love” in that the main character wants to have passionate sex right away while the two of them are still youthful. Without the simile, the man still could have gotten his message across that he wanted to have intercourse in the near future. The use of simile and metaphor gave the poem a little zest that elucidated what the man wanted and what his intentions were.

Along with simile, metaphor, and rhyme, other literary devices distinguish the theme of a poem. Imagery is yet another element in “To his Coy Mistress.” Various images give a clear insight into the main character’s deepest thoughts. “World” and “time” (1) are great visual images that reflect a sense of whole-being and/or everything. The man knows he doesn’t have all the time in the world and that he and his lover must have sex as soon as possible.“World” and “time” are excellent words to use in reference to waiting, or living the longest life imaginable. The words paint a picture with the way in which the man uses them. Later on in the poem, the man claims, “While the youthful hue / Sits on thy skin like morning dew” (33). This is a fantastic use of tactile imagery in that it is very easy to visualize a damp, cool morning as dew lingers on your arm. This visual is significant in that the man is saying youth is amongst him and his mistress and it is here right this very second. If they are to progress in their relationship they should start right away for they are both in their prime right now. The man is comparing their stage of life with the dew on his arm and claiming since the dew on my arm isn’t going anywhere, we must as well enjoy each other before it is too late. The use of imagery is quite imperative in that also helps to clarify the poem’s premise and paint a picture as to what is happening throughout the poem’s entirety.

Literary devices are wonderful elements to literature that help to make stories and poems more comprehendible and enjoyable to read. Rhymes can give poetry an added sense of pizzazz that helps to better the poem as a whole. Similes allow for clarification as to what the poem’s central idea pertains to. Imagery paints a picture that gives the poem an added sense of meaning and is able to show what is really going on. All in all, the poem is of vital importance because it offers a chance at identifying the literary devices being used to shed light on how the poem is significant and meaningful. Without a lucid understanding of a poem, it is simply boring and pointless because it can be complicated to understand completely. Taking the time to realize what the poem is saying and the central idea is the best way to learn to enjoy and comprehend any type of poetry.

Works Cited

Marvell, Andrew. “To his Coy Mistress.” Perrine’s Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense. Thomas R. Arp, Greg Johnson. Boston, MA: Thomson Higher Education, 2006.730-731.

